

Commentaries

Integrated Product Policy (IPP)

Workshop and Conclusions for the International Journal of LCA*

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1 Background

International organisations such as the OECD, the UN Commission on Sustainable Development and the European member states are discussing a new type of environmental policy. The European Commission, for example, is studying a shift from the regulation of specific media (solid waste, specific emissions, waste water, etc.) to an integrated approach looking at the whole life cycle of products and involving all stakeholders. Obviously, the LCA community is very much excited about these ideas. Current and coming milestones are:

1. A study commissioned by EC DGXI, conducted by Ernst & Young (March, 1998). Five IPP building blocks are identified by the Ernst & Young study:
 - Transmitting environmentally-relevant information about products up and down the product chain,
 - managing wastes,
 - creating markets for green goods,
 - developing the innovation of more environmentally-sound products (Life Cycle Assessment-based Design for Environment tools),
 - allocating responsibility along the life cycle.
2. Informal meeting of the European Environmental Ministers (Weimar, May 1999) stressing the need for pilot projects as well as the voluntary character of IPP;
3. Workshops in Brussels (Dec. 1998), Berlin (Feb. 2000) and Stockholm (Feb. 2000);
4. IPP Greenbook of the European Commission will be issued by the middle of 2000. Starting in summer, a pilot project with a voluntary industry and all the affected life cycle stakeholders is planned.

2 The Berlin Workshop "Outlook for Product-Related Environmental Protection"

The German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety (BMU) and the German Association of Industry (BDI) have organised a workshop focusing on IPP. Juergen Trittin, German Minister for the Environment, stressed the importance of a life-cycle oriented approach and a need for the integration of all stakeholders and all environmental issues. He stated that the tool box for IPP has already been developed, and mentioned LCA in particular as a reasonable tool for comparing products. James Currie (Director General DG Environment) stressed the part-

nership approach along the life cycle in finding the most cost effective manner to implement environmental objectives. The need for clear environmental objectives was mentioned by various participants, such as Andreas Troge (president of Federal Environmental Agency). Most speeches addressed "communication", "co-operation" and "integration" as basic principles of IPP.

One discussion point was who sets the objectives – the parliaments or the life cycle stakeholders. The issue of agreed environmental objectives sounds familiar for LCA people looking at the ongoing discussion on weightings in LCAs. Looking at the discussions, the voluntary approach of IPP seemed to be crucial for the success of IPP, although several participants stressed the need for a regulatory framework. It seemed to be a consensus, that product policy / product development should still be the job of industry and not of governments.

A specific topic was the issue of environmental communication. Therefore, the president of BDI, Hans-Olaf Henkel, and Juergen Trittin announced a joint brochure providing recommendations on how to communicate environmentally-relevant information about products in line with ISO 14020. Again, the life cycle perspective seems to be very much accepted.

The current initiatives were addressed in specific workshops carried out by different product groups (buildings, cars, chemical products, electronics, paper products), consequently demonstrating that a lot of initiatives are already in place. The workshop stressed the importance of integrating not only industry but also NGOs representing the customers, i.e. the use phase of the life cycle. Obviously, the consumer focus of IPP is a very important aspect as "green" products need a significant demand and not only very committed industry leaders¹.

Concluding the workshop, the whole topic of IPP remains vague considering the goals and the manner of implementation – in particular with regard to the role of governments. The hope is that the European Commission is not picking one product group and punishing selected industries with new regulations – considering that there is already a large number of existing regulations that already individually cover all aspects of the whole life cycle. However, no discussion seemed to be necessary anymore on the tools of IPP. It was stated that the IPP tool-box – namely LCA – is well known. Looking at the discussion within this journal, the tool box

¹ James Currie cited as an example Bill Ford: "Henry Ford had declared customers could have whatever color they wanted, as long as it was black. To achieve my vision, I am declaring customers can have any vehicle they want, as long as it is green."

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seems to be well known, but there is still a need for further improvements concerning a lot of issues – including LCA.

3 Conclusions for the International Journal of LCA

Looking at the on-going discussions, integrated product policy seems to become important for the LCA community and should therefore be reflected in the International Journal of LCA. Reasons include that IPP:

- clearly follows life cycle thinking,
- encourages the usage of the life cycle tool box, e.g. for product-innovation,
- could become a political umbrella for a new co-operation along the life cycle – beyond the old roles of life

- cycle stakeholders acting on their own,
- faces similar issues as the LCA community looking e.g. at environmental value / objective setting.

Looking at these reasons, interesting discussions could arise in our journal dealing with:

- existing examples for the usage of LCA as part of IPP (e.g. LCA supporting Design for Environment),
- LCA tool-box issues (e.g. linkage and applications of tools),
- stakeholder involvement in life cycle based tools, etc.

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Conference Reports

Moving from Problems to Solutions – 2nd National LCA Conference Melbourne, Australia 23rd to 24th February 2000

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The most striking feature of the 2nd National Conference on Life Cycle Assessment was the focus on solutions to the myriad of obstacles to progressing with LCA which were raised in the first National Conference held four years earlier. There were many examples of LCA application, from the consideration of life cycle aspects in the Sydney Olympics Village project through to full LCA being undertaken in the waste management policy area.

The first half day of the conference laid down some challenges to the LCA community with the Federal Government, building industry and packaging industries stressing the need for the LCA community to produce results which can be used in policy and design decision-making contexts, and not just by environmental experts.

Bo Weidema presented a keynote address that focused on the use of LCA for promoting sustainability. In his presentation, he pointed out that there seems to be no proportion between the way LCA deals with a certain issue and the environmental importance of that issue. He said that this is true both with regard to the products studied (packaging versus packaging contents), the life cycle stages (for example, there is very little focus on the use phase), the applications (for example, eco-labelling versus product development studies) and environmental impact categories (for example, bio-diversity versus material resource use). The point here was not to denigrate the work already undertaken but to try to focus future work where it really matters, particularly in Australia where we are just beginning to build a body of work on LCA.

The afternoon sessions on the first day were parallel sessions on different aspects of LCA.

Session 1, Approaches to LCA by Industry and Others, gave perspectives of how the aluminium industry and BHP in Australia are developing and using LCA.

Session 2, LCA Interfaces, looked at how LCA can be used in related environmental decision-making contexts such as cleaner production and eco-labelling.

Session 3, LCA and Product and Building Design, showed diverse approaches from designers, furniture manufacturers, input-output analysts and a public authority to the application of LCA.

The waste management session examined three detailed LCA projects on different aspects of waste management in Australia.

The whole morning of the second day was devoted to life cycle impact assessment in recognition of its importance and poor state of development in Australia. Helias A. Udo de Haes gave an overview of the current state of development in impact assessment, particularly through work of the SETAC Working Group on Impact Assessment. Udo de Haes raised some of the issues surrounding the use of endpoint modelling in approaches such as Eco-Indicator 99 versus midpoint modelling such as in the CML method.

Sven Lundie outlined some detailed impact assessment work being developed for Australia, particularly in the area of human and eco-toxicity.

An Australian ecologist, Phillip Sutton, gave a presentation on the uniqueness of the Australian environment, and how this may not be well accounted for in current impact modelling imported largely from Europe. Australia is one on the driest continents on the planet with highly variable water flows both from summer to winter but also from season to season. Compared to many European and North American environments, "Australia has several orders of magnitude more species diversity and very high levels of often very local endemism. So, in Australia, the rule of thumb is that 'most patches of habitat count' – especially when we take plants and invertebrates into account." This is partly due to the lack of catastrophic events such as glaciation or major volcanic activity in Australia, and the only recent (in the last 200 years) introduction of pest species. The failure to take account of such factors in LCA, given Australia's position as a major supplier of many minerals and forest products, is a fundamental omission and possibly our most serious deficiency in LCA application in Australia to date.

The conference wound up with a panel session of local and international guests, and here the shift of focus from the previous conference was most noticeable. Whereas, four years ago, the main issues were inventory data and its availability, at this conference the discussion centred on how to make LCA methods and, particularly, impact assessment more relevant to Australia, and where to streamline the LCA process so as to make it more useable in current decision-making environments.

Selected papers and information on where to purchase proceedings can be found at <http://lca-conf.rmit.edu.au>.